



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington D.C. 20520

Dear Senator Pell:

I wish to thank you for your thoughtful letter of February 22 addressed to the President on the subject of U.S. policy toward Afghanistan following the death of Ambassador Dubs there on February 14. Your suggestions deal with specific policy issues we have ourselves had under discussion and, consequently are extremely helpful to receive at this time.

On February 22, as I am sure you know, the White House announced that the President had decided to "severely reduce" our economic assistance in Afghanistan for FY 1979 and FY 1980 and to terminate the military training program we had planned. These decisions were the result of our ongoing review of relations with Afghanistan and the policies of the Afghan Government. They also took into account the circumstances surrounding Ambassador Dubs' death. This should permit a fifty percent reduction in AID American direct hire staff.

Development assistance projects already underway and which address the needs of the least privileged sector of Afghan society are continuing. We believe we continue to have a humanitarian interest in helping to meet some of the basic human needs of Afghanistan's poor majority.

You should also know that we have begun transferring Peace Corps Volunteers from Afghanistan to other countries where their services are welcome and where they can have a viable experience. The Afghan Government has shown little interest in our Peace Corps program and we believe that all of the Volunteers will have departed Afghanistan in the very near future.

The Honorable  
Claiborne Pell,  
United States Senate.

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At this time, we do not have under active consideration the appointment of a new Ambassador, but we are reviewing carefully proper staffing levels in light of our current posture in Afghanistan. In examining those questions you can be certain that we will give great weight to considerations for the safety of our personnel in Afghanistan. We must also be concerned with such questions as the level of representation needed in Kabul to insure access to the political leadership of the country as well as the kind of leadership we need within our Mission. I want to assure you that your views on these matters will be given every consideration in our deliberations.

Once again, I want to express our appreciation for your interest in these matters. If you or any member of your staff would like to discuss further specific aspects of our policy towards Afghanistan, I know that the Department officers responsible for day-to-day Afghan affairs (Jane Coon, Country Director for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, and Ronald Lorton, Country Officer for Afghanistan) would be happy to receive your views and answer your questions.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.  
Assistant Secretary  
for Congressional Relations

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